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ABSTRACT

One of the principal problems the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) has in carrying out its responsibility to educate Indian children is the high turnover rate among its teachers; a large proportion of teachers in the BIA school system leave after their first year or second year of work. Teachers at six elementary schools on the Navajo Reservation were interviewed to determine the features they considered rewarding and the drawbacks associated with their place of work. The countryside itself and the cultural characteristics of the children were cited as the most rewarding aspects. Isolation in some form was the major drawback. Long distances had to be traveled for services of any kind. Medical services were not available on the reservation, although the Public Health Service had clinics established there. Because of lack of competition on the reservation there were high prices in the local area for food and automobile repairs. Social life was especially restricted. Job related problems were most frequently concerned with administration. A fourth of those interviewed, all Anglo, were dissatisfied with the BIA's implementation of the Indian Preference Policy; they felt some Indians were given preference for jobs for which they were not fully qualified. The BIA reward structure is complicated by the need for substantial documentation and reward is not given consistently enough to affect teacher attitudes. Recommendations to increase level of satisfaction among BIA teachers conclude the report. (DS)

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FACTORS INVOLVED IN JOB SATISFACTION AMONG TEACHERS IN THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS SCHOOL SYSTEM ON THE NAVAJO RESERVATION

by

Frederick D. Smith

INTRODUCTION

The present study took place in six elementary schools that are run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Navajo Reservation. Five of these schools were boarding schools and one was a day school. It was concerned primarily with the teachers in these schools and with some of the problems that they face in living and in working there.

Fuchs and Havighurst[1] estimate that there are about seven thousand teachers working in classes with a preponderance of Indian students. About eighteen hundred are employed by the Bureau, forty-nine hundred are in public school systems and three hundred in mission or other private schools. One of the principal problems which the Bureau has in carrying out its responsibility to educate Indian children has been the relatively high turnover rate among its teachers. A large proportion of teachers in the B.I.A.'s school system leave after their first or second year of work. A study made by the B.I.A. showed that a little over half of the teachers who left their job from 1964 to 1967 had been there less than two years.[2]

The current recession may have reduced the turnover rate to some extent, but there is no reason to believe that the underlying causes of dissatisfaction that some teachers feel with their involvement in the B.I.A.'s school system have been alleviated. The majority of these schools are located in a physical and cultural environment different in many respects from that in which incoming non-Navajo teachers have lived most of their lives. For most of them, it is their first experience working on an Indian reservation or with Indian students. Not only are the students and the surrounding community of a different cultural background from the average teacher, but also the social environment within a B.I.A. compound differs from that typically experienced by most teachers.

Isolation of several different forms is a fundamental cause of dissatisfaction among teachers in the B.I.A. school system. For example, in a national study done of Indian education, it was found that thirty-eight percent of those who left teaching positions with the Bureau between 1964 and 1967 stated that they were leaving because of what was broadly described as the geographic isolation of the school in which they were working.[3]

As can be seen by the following summary statement, Wax, *et. al.*[4] think of isolation as a problem not only for teachers specifically but for Indian education in general:

> Isolation — lack of communication, social distance — is the cardinal factor in the problem of Indian education . . . Because isolation affects so many contexts — the community as a whole, the school within the community, the pupil within the classroom, and the teacher within the educational system — its effect is greatly intensified.

Purposes of the Study

In this study a search was made for factors which affect one's sense of satisfaction both with the job and also with living conditions among teaching staff in the Bureau of Indian Affairs school system on the Navajo Reservation. In this article the descriptive data which was gathered will be discussed and a statistical analysis of the quantitative data will be reported separately.

Another purpose of the study is to provide suggestions for change or for further study which are designed to increase the level of satisfaction felt by teaching personnel with their job and with living conditions.

The Sample

The sample was comprised of employees of the B.I.A. who were teaching on the Navajo Reservation during the academic year 1975-76. It included individuals with one of two occupational statuses. The first were teachers who had completed at least a Bachelor of Arts degree at a four-year college. The second were training instructors who had not yet completed a college degree. They were Navajo personnel who were training both on the job and in college level classes to become teachers. They taught at the kindergarten level only and had full responsibility for the class. Five of the seventy individuals who were included in the sample were training instructors.

Table 2 shows a breakdown of the basic characteristics of the sample. Until recently, all but a very small percentage of the teachers employed by the B.I.A. on the Navajo Reservation were Anglos. As a result of Federal and Navajo Tribal programs to encourage young Navajos to go into teaching, this imbalance has been changing. In the sample of teachers used in this study, 67% were Anglo, 27% Navajo, and 6% Black.

Table 2: Background Characteristics of the Sample.

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Age		
20–24	4	6
25–29	26	37
30–34	19	27
35–39	3	4
40–44	2	3
45–49	3	4
50–54	6	9
55–59	3	4
60–64	4	6
	70	100
Sex		
Male	20	29
Female	50	71
	70	100
Marital Status		
Married	32	46
Never Married	33	47
Divorced	2	3
Widowed	1	1
Separated	2	3
	70	100
Race		
Black	4	6
Navajo	19	27
White	47	67
	70	100
Religion		
Protestant	33	48
Mormon	3	4
Catholic	15	22
Jewish	1	7
Other	7	10
None	10	14
	69	99*
Education		
Some College	6	9
Completed College	8	11
Some Graduate Work	31	44
Masters Degree	14	20
Graduate Work Beyond Masters	11	15
	70	100

* due to round-off error

Table 2 Cont'd.

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Family Income		
Less than 5,000	4	6
5,000– 6,999	5	7
7,000– 9,999	9	13
10,000–12,999	9	13
13,000–15,999	23	33
16,000–19,999	6	9
20,000 or more	13	19
	69	100
Region		
West Coast	8	11
Rocky Mountains	5	7
Southwest	27	39
Plains	3	4
Northeast	18	26
Southeast	9	13
	70	100
Community of Origin		
Large Metropolitan	11	16
Medium Metropolitan	8	11
Small Metropolitan	9	13
Semi-Urban	9	13
Semi-Rural	4	6
Rural	26	37
Other	3	4
	70	100

The majority of the respondents were fairly young. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of them were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four. Seventy-one percent of them were female. Almost half were married. When asked for the size of their community or origin, the largest single category of response cited a rural community. However, forty percent of them were from metropolitan areas ranging in size from fifty thousand to several million.

The mean for the amount of time that an individual in this sample has worked with the B.I.A. is four and one half years. There are a number of old-timers in the Bureau's school system, but there is also a high turnover rate which brings in a lot of new individuals each year. Although the mean is four and one half years, the mode is only one year. Almost half of the sample (44%) has been there two years or less.

In most cases, the teachers lived on the school grounds. The local compound is the community in which they work and live at least throughout the working week. On weekends most of the professional staff leave the compound for a while. Frequently they make weekly trips to a nearby town for shopping, a movie and other recreation.

Research Procedures

Descriptive material was obtained through interviews with the respondents, through informal conversations with the respondents and others living or working on the compound and also through personal observation by the researcher. To conduct an interview, an appointment was made with each teacher for a time that would best fit with his/her schedule. Usually interviews occurred either after students went home but before school closed or else in the evening hours.

In addition, a narrative was kept each day of events which occurred in the field that related to the objectives of the study. A notebook containing the narrative was carried by the researcher throughout most of the working hours of the day and events were recorded shortly after they occurred. The narrative was never taken with the researcher after school hours. Anything of importance was recorded before going to bed or early the next day.

Analysis of the Data

Four basic questions were asked in the interviews:

1. What do you like best about living in this area?
2. What do you think are the most rewarding features for a teacher in working at this school?
3. What do you think are some of the problems teachers have living in a community such as this one?
4. What are some of the problems that teachers have in working at a school such as this one?

The positive features of living on the Navajo Reservation or of working for the B.I.A. that were identified tended to be things that would be difficult to alter or enhance. For example, when teachers were asked what they liked about living on the Reservation, almost two thirds (62%) of their responses had something to do with the countryside itself. Often mentioned was the fact that it is scenic and that the land is not overcrowded nor the air polluted. A frequent response to this question centered on the idea that the Navajo Reservation is peaceful, quiet and lacks many of the pressures of city life.

When asked for the most rewarding features of working for the B.I.A., the largest category of responses, 41% of the total, mentioned innate or cultural characteristics of the children rather than specific features of their working relationships with them. For example, many said that they enjoyed working with Indian children, with children of a different cultural background from their own or with second-language children.

The next largest category of responses, making up 15% of the total, was also mentioned by several people in response to the question asking about satisfaction with living conditions. They centered on the salary of the job, its fringe beneifts, and, in a few cases, the fact that they were glad to have a job at all.

Another 13% of the responses mentioned that there is a lot of freedom in most of the schools for a teacher to run the classroom as he/she sees fit. Several mentioned that they could implement their own philosophy of education and try new teaching techniques. Respondents considered it unlikely that they would be criticized by the principal, teacher supervisor or parents for their performance within the classroom itself.

An equal number of teachers said that they thought one of the most rewarding features of working at a B.I.A. school was their interaction with other teachers. Several of these were Navajo teachers who said that they specifically liked working with other young Navajo teachers who were concerned about Indian education and who wanted to exchange ideas, to try new techniques and to develop their own approach to working effectively with Indian children in the classroom.

The positive features that were mentioned by teachers as a part of their involvement with the B.I.A. could be emphasized in recruiting new personnel, but, by and large, they would be difficult to alter to increase satisfaction with the job or with living conditions for personnel already working for the B.I.A.

Several major problems with living conditions and also with the job were identified through the descriptive research. When asked about the drawbacks of living on the Reservation, nearly two thirds (63%) of the responses were concerned with isolation of some form. The most frequently voiced complaint was the long distances which had to be traveled for services of any kind. Those that were mentioned were food, medical, recreational, automobile repairs and a few others.

Medical services were a concern of the non-Indian teachers more so than Navajo, but included people in all age categories. Free medical

attention is provided for the Navajo staff by the Public Health Service but is only available to non-Indian employees of the B.I.A. in cases of emergency.

For both food and also automobile repairs, respondents complained primarily the high prices in the local area. There is little or no competition to provide these services in the small communities on the Navajo Reservation.

Another type of isolation, mentioned by twelve of the respondents, was that they felt that their social life was very restricted. Several people stated that there were very few people in the immediate area who shared some of their interests and who were approximately their age. Six of these people mentioned that the fact that their social life was limited to a very small community during the working week put a strain on personal relationships. Particularly at the smaller compounds, a teacher sees the same people at work as he/she sees after school hours.

The most common job-related problem cited by teachers was concerned with the administration. One hundred three responses, 60% of the total, to the question which asked teachers to discuss problems that they had in working at their school mentioned either the B.I.A. as a whole (24%) or the administration at their local school (36%). By "the B.I.A. as a whole" is meant the administrative structure of the B.I.A. from the Federal level to that which controls the Navajo Reservation.

Concerning the general administration of the B.I.A., the problem that was discussed most vehemently by the respondents was the Indian Preference Policy and the manner in which respondents believe it is being implemented. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the people interviewed — all of whom were Anglo — thought that the B.I.A. had gone too far with their policy to grant preference to people of Indian descent when hiring and giving promotions.

The main stated objection was in the manner in which they perceive that the policy is being implemented. Many of these respondents thought that Indians should take over responsibility for educating Indian children and, all other things being equal, they should be given preference in being hired and promoted at local educational institutions. However, they felt that in many cases Indian candidates were given preference for jobs when they were not on an equal footing with the non-Indian candidate in terms of academic training and professional experience. Several also said that as a result of this policy, they thought that some Indian personnel were hired for teaching and administrative positions for which they were not fully qualified.[5]

None of the Navajo teachers mentioned this policy as a problem. Except under unusual circumstances, only problems which were brought up by the respondent were discussed with that individual. For this reason, the opinions of Navajo teachers about the policy were not ascertained.

There are a number of rules and regulations which apply to teachers in the B.I.A. schools which are not usually applied to public school teachers. They were mentioned by some of the respondents as an illustration of what they considered to be a degree of inflexibility in Bureau policy. For example, teachers are expected to arrive at school at 8:00 a.m. and to stay on the job until 5:00 p.m. This schedule is followed during the academic year and also during the summer when the children are not in school. In effect, their work schedule is the same as that of other civil servants with no particular allowances made for the nature of their job.

There is nothing in the researcher's data to indicate whether more or less work would be done if teachers' schedules were made more flexible to reflect their actual involvement with children, but 25% of the respondents did consider it a source of dissatisfaction with their job. On the other hand, although it was often mentioned in the interviews, it appeared to the researcher that it did not evoke as much depth of feeling as did some of the other issues.

The use of rewards and sanctions within the B.I.A. was found to be less effective than might otherwise be the case. There are several different situations in which a teacher may be evaluated by a principal or by a teacher supervisor. However, except under unusual circumstances, teachers are always given a satisfactory rating. A great deal of documentation is needed to give any other kind of evaluation and, as a result, it is rarely done.

The reward system also appeared to the researcher not to be functioning effectively. In terms of the formal procedures that have been established by the B.I.A., there are several channels through which recognition could be given to teachers for superior performance of their job. One reason for these channels not being used effectively has already been mentioned. Generally speaking only satisfactory ratings are given. Since both require substantial documentation, it seems to be as difficult to give a superior rating as it is to give a poor one. In addition to these periodic evaluations, letters of commendation can be placed in an individual's file or cash awards given for superior job performance. To the researcher, it seemed that both of them were given sparingly by some administrators and more liberally by others. This situation pointed to the possibility that sufficiently firm guidelines have not been established through which rewards are distributed and that too often decisions of this nature are left entirely

to the discretion of individual administrators. Although ample opportunities exist within the B.I.A. for distributing rewards, it seemed to the researcher that they were not given often enough or consistently enough to make a difference in teachers' attitudes or behavior.

At the local level, the problem that was most often cited by teachers was connected with the principal of the school at which they were working. Fifty (50) responses, 29% of the total for this question, were in this category. Most of their remarks seemed to the researcher to reflect the shortcomings or idiosyncrasies of individual principals. One generalization that did emerge, however, was that many teachers did not see their principal as being able to provide the type of leadership needed in an educational institution. Many, though not all, principals were not seen as a positive, motivating, or encouraging force in the school.

For the most part, criticisms of principals were of a rather general nature concerning their ability to provide leadership in an educational setting. These criticisms were not made consistently by respondents but came entirely from four of the schools that were studied. As a result, the researcher came tentatively to the conclusion that the root of the problem that teachers seem to have with their principals lies primarily with the individuals selected for the office rather than with the office itself. It may be that if a more careful selection process were used to recruit principals that this problem could be alleviated.

Finally, approximately 10% of the responses to this question mentioned a lack of communication between the faculty and the parents of students as a problem that they experienced on their job. Essentially, they felt that the parents were not interested in the school or the formal education process and that they did little to support it. This complaint was often phrased by respondents in terms of a lack of concern on the parents' part for their children's education. Teachers thought that their job was made more difficult and their efforts less effective because of this apparent lack of support.

The main reason that teachers had for this opinion is that parents rarely talked with them about their children's performance in the classroom. Even when parents come to the school for events such as a movie, athletic contest or a feast day, many of them do not interact with the faculty. On the other hand, most respondents were candid in admitting that they too had not made a concerted effort to interact with the parents.

From the researcher's observation and discussion with Navajo personnel, the basis for this opinion seems to be correct but the

conclusion is not. When questioned on this point, Navajo respondents stated that the parents are generally interested in their children's education. Several reasons were given for the apparent lack of concern teachers have noticed. First, many of the parents do not speak English very well and, as a result, would have some difficulty communicating without an interpreter. Second, they have been told in the past that school is the business of professionals and that parents should leave it to them. Third, some of the parents did not complete very many grades themselves and have not been in school for a long time. As a result, it may be that they feel ill-at-ease in a classroom setting when teacher and students are present. This possibility was suggested by a Navajo teacher as an explanation of the fact that not infrequently parents visit the kindergarten while it is in session but rarely visit the upper grades.

Recommendations

In this section, concrete recommendations for change or for future study will be made. From the analysis of the data, it was noted that teachers feel isolated from services, social activities, and the surrounding Navajo community.

As a result of these findings, it is recommended that a feasibility study be made of the possibility that either 1) the B.I.A. itself provide some of the needed services to its employees or 2) outside business interests be encouraged to do so on a large scale so that the products can be sold at relatively low cost. Providing food and also services for automobiles would be the most likely areas upon which to concentrate. The location(s) could be at any of the agency towns in the interior of the Reservation. The shopping area presently located at Window Rock is an example of just such a project run by private businesses.

A substantial number of the non-Indian teachers were concerned about the lack of availability of medical services to them. Since the Public Health Service already has clinics established on the Reservation, it would be inefficient for the B.I.A. to duplicate these services for its own personnel. Instead it is recommended that a linkage be established between P.H.S. and the B.I.A. such that non-Indian employees of the latter can benefit from the medical services provided by the former. Initially, it should be done as a pilot project at one or two central locations on the Reservation.

A common complaint of the respondents was isolation from social activities and from a social life with other people who are approximately their own age and who share some of their interests. It is recommended that a study be conducted to determine realistic low-cost procedures for increasing interaction among teachers

working for the B.I.A. with other teachers either on the local compound or on nearby compounds. Many of these schools are quite small. Approximately half, for example, have ten teachers or less on the faculty. As a result, these teachers see the same people at their own school day after day, both on the job and off of it. For this reason, the researcher believes that more interest would be generated on the part of teachers if procedures were developed for increasing interaction with individuals on a regular basis at other schools. They might be of a recreational nature or they could be designed for personal or professional development. In the event that the emphasis is on recreational activities, care should be taken that these activities be of interest to both male and female employees. Since approximately 70% of the B.I.A.'s elementary school teachers on the Reservation are women, suggestions involving male-dominated sports, for example, would be of limited interest.

Teachers mentioned the lack of interaction between themselves and the parents of their students. To establish the sort of linkage between the teachers on a compound and the Navajo community that would involve them in meaningful interaction would be a difficult task. Not infrequently, they participate in events together without any meaningful communication occurring between members of the two groups.

Nevertheless, two recommendations can be made to promote interaction between teachers and the Navajo community. First, it is recommended that a homevisit be made at least once during the year by each teacher to the home of each of their students. This has been done before by the B.I.A.'s teaching staff and could be done again successfully. The author has himself been involved in an educational program on an Indian reservation in which homevisits were mandatory for teachers. They were done successfully by them and were considered by most to be a valuable experience. Not only does the teacher meet the parents but, in some cases, he sees another side of the students when they are in their home environment.

Second, it is recommended that situations be created so that teachers and members of the community participate together in small problem-solving groups. The problems should be real ones of a practical nature that are confronting that school at that time. Some inducement should be provided to get people from the community to attend events such as these, and care should be taken to see that the discussions are not dominated by the teaching or administrative staff. The basis for this recommendation is an experiment done by Sherif and Sherif which involved interpersonal relations in a multi-racial setting.[6] They found that the only way they were able to get Blacks and Whites to cooperate with each other was to put them in situations in which they had to work together towards the solution of a common problem. Not only did the two racial groups cooperate on the tasks but friction between them and prejudicial attitudes were reduced as a result of it.

There were two significant problems that were identified with the administration of the B.I.A. The first was the Indian preference policy. It is recommended that the B.I.A. stay closely to the original guideline of the policy which is to give preference to Indian candidates for jobs only when they are fully qualified for it in terms of both academic preparation and professional experience.

The Bureau's system of rewards and sanctions that can be applied to teachers was found to be less effective than it should be. It is recommended that steps be taken so that more discriminating evaluations of teachers' performance of their job can be made by administrators. It is further recommended that letters of commendation and cash awards be given on a more liberal basis and that guidelines be established to standardize the situations in which they are dispensed.

A number of the criticisms that were made of the administration were directed towards the principal. It is recommended that a study be done to determine the characteristics of successful leadership at local schools within the B.I.A. to provide better recruiting procedures for the principalship.

It is recommended that the B.I.A. hire an individual who has not formerly been in the employ of the Bureau to take responsibility for implementation of these changes. This individual should be recognized as a linkage between the administration and the teaching staff. As noted in the previous section of this paper, antagonism of a limited nature does exist between the teachers and administration both at the local level and at higher levels. In situations of the nature, there is tendency for communication channels to become blocked.[7] The Author's opinion is that where cooperation between the two is needed to reach a decision satisfactory to both parties that teachers, in particular, would be more willing and able to express themselves to an outside change agent than to someone who solely represented the administration.

The change agent should establish a close and positive working relationship with both teachers and the administration. This linkage should emhasize relationships that are relatively informal, positive and encouraging designed to maximize the flow of information. In addition to implementing changes, it is expected that the individual would receive regular feedback from the parties involved as changes are taking place.

The objective of these recommendations is to effect an ordered change in some aspects of the structure of the B.I.A.'s educational system which, in turn, will increase the level of satisfaction with their involvement with that system among teaching personnel. It can be argued that happier employees would be more productive for the same salary. It can also be argued that by increasing the level of

satisfaction of its employees that the teacher turnover rate would be reduced thus, in turn, reducing the costs of moving and training new personnel.

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[1] E. Fuchs and R.J. Havighurst, *To Live on This Earth: American Indian Education* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1972), p. 191-192.

[2] *Op. Cit.*, p. 201.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] M. Wax, *et. al.* "Formal Education in an American Indian Community", *Supplement to Social Problems*, XI (1964), p. 89.

[5] Respondents were not questioned about their knowledge of the intent of this policy. The basic idea of it is that if an Indian candidate can be found who is qualified for a position that he or she should be given preference for it over a non-Indian candidate. See: *U.S. Supreme Court Bulletin*, Vol. 2, (New York: Commerce Clearing House, 1974), pp. B35595-B35614.

[6] M. Sherif and C.W. Sherif, *Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation: The Robbers Cave Experiment* (Norman, Oklahoma: University Book Exchange, 1961).

[7] M.N. Zald, "Organization as Politics: An Analysis of Community Organization Agencies", *Strategies of Community Organization: A Book of Readings*, (Itasca, Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.) 1974, p. 101, F.M. Cox, *et. al.* (eds.).